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Housekeeper's Chat

Thursday, August 21, 1930

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: What Price Party Frocks? Approved by Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletins available: "Fitting Dresses and Blouses;" "Planning and Recording Family Expenditures."

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It's odd, how one can be thinking along a certain line, and suddenly be reminded of something entirely different. That was the case with me this morning. A friend of mine, who has a daughter about eighteen or so, came in to see me, bringing the wreck of a torn dress on her arm. A blue chiffon party dress--and before I could really discuss her problem with her, my mind was off thinking of an amusing and interesting conversation between a boy named Roy and his mother.

It was this way. The mother said, "Roy, take your elbows off the table. It's bad manners to put them on the table like that."

"Father does," said Roy, calmly.

"So he does," answered the mother. For a moment she scarcely knew what to say next. "He sets a poor example, doesn't he? But, Roy,"--and this, it seemed to me, showed what a wise woman she was--"Father has privileges that you are not old enough for. Father pays the rent. When you can pay the rent, or take care of yourself financially, you will be able to behave carelessly if you wish. No one will say anything, although you may do things that are not pleasant to look at. Maybe you won't want to, though. Until then, however, it is my privilege to point out the best ways of doing things, in the hope that my ideas will take root here and there.

"I see," said Roy, thoughtfully. "When we're big, and earn our own living we can choose what we'll do and what we'll buy, 'n everything. But when we're little we have to learn what are the best ways, don't we?"

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Perhaps you can see how this conversation popped into my mind when I caught sight of an entirely different kind of rent--the great tear in the blue party frock, wondering who would have to pay for it, in the long run.

"Alice was dancing last night, and another girl caught her high spiked heel in this dress," the mother explained. "Do you think it could be mended, Aunt Sammy?"





I shook my head doubtfully. The tear extended around to the middle of the front, and the pull also showed at one armhole, and at the back of the neck. "How many evils can be laid to high heels!" I thought to myself. Perhaps you've noticed my aversion to high heels.

"It was only the second time Alice ever wore the dress," said my friend, sadly, "and it cost twenty-five dollars."

"Twelve dollars and a half a party," I figured. "Girls never think of their pleasures in terms of the cost of their clothes, do they?"

"I believe I'll ask Alice about that," she said. "Maybe we could find out which materials give the best service and how much party clothes ought to cost."

She came back in a few days with some interesting figures. It wasn't very hard for her, with her daughter's help, to make a list of all the party frocks Alice had ever had. She looked up her old account books and found the cost of each or the cost of the materials in it, as most of them were made at home. Then she added the value of any materials bought for making over, and any cleaning bills both remembered.

Alice got down her "memory album". I suppose most girls have them--big scrap books filled with souvenirs of good times---dance programs, faded flowers, theatre stubs, pictures, and so forth. Any girl can visualize herself in the dress she wore on a given occasion, so it was easy to put a check mark opposite each dress for each time it was worn. The cost was then divided by the number of times worn, with results something like this:

Blue chiffon: Bought ready-made, \$25.00. Worn twice. Cost per wearing, \$12.50. Pink crepe de chine; made at home, cost \$12.00 for material, \$.70 for pattern and sewing silk, \$4.00 for cleaning twice, \$4.00 for dyeing deep rose. Wore 18 times, total cost \$20.70, cost per trip, \$1.15.

The dress that cost the least per wearing was a black velvet "hand-me-down" that belonged to an aunt. Alice paid a dollar to have this dress steamed, after remodeling it herself, and added some fur trimming at a cost of \$5.00. She wore it to 27 dinners, informal dances, theatres, and other occasions where full evening dress was not required. Twenty-three cents was the average cost of each wearing.

It isn't necessary for me to describe any more of Alice's clothes. Any girl can find out for herself in a similar way just how much or how little her parties are costing, in terms of the clothes worn.

A more accurate way than my friend's would be to keep records for a period of six months or a year from the present time. It is easy to devise some simple chart on which to mark the wearing of each garment with a check or stroke. You might put a new dress on a hanger of its own, with a tag which can be marked as the dress is taken out. You may be surprised to find that you do not wear dress-up and party dresses as often as you imagine you do, before they are out of style or damaged because of their fragile texture or light.



The moral is obvious: If a girl can make herself feel happy at social gatherings in relatively inexpensive clothes, she can have more of them for a limited outlay, especially if she makes them herself. An effective appearance is gained by pretty coloring, interesting textures, and becoming designs, rather than by spending a great deal.

After all, we come back to my young friend Roy and his father. For the cost of parties and other good times and privileges is borne by the parents, along with the rent and other necessities. Surely the paying parent should investigate the cost of party clothing and check it when it runs too high. At the same time the parents have an educational duty---that of acquainting their children early in life with real values in what they buy.

When Alice can "pay for the rent" in her dress, she may choose other fragile frocks, but in the meantime she may have learned a little lesson on this subject.

I have a question today about cleaning gas stoves. Somehow I suspect the writer hasn't been housekeeping very long. I hope she won't take it amiss that I have discovered her inexperience! She says:

"The burners on my gas stove are clogged. How shall I clean them? Poking them with a hairpin doesn't do much good." You see why I came to the conclusion I did.

The hairpin is said to be woman's universal tool, but it won't do everything. A better way would be to take the burners out of their sockets and brush off all loose dirt with a stiff brush. Then place them in a large kettle or pan that will not be injured by washing soda. Enamel or agateware is good for the purpose. Mix half a pound of washing soda with each gallon of water used, and cover the burners. Boil for about half an hour. Rinse and brush them, wipe them with paper or cotton waste, fit them into the stove, and dry them thoroughly by lighting the gas. If the flames do not then burn up clear and blue, the air in-take of the burners may need adjustment. The gas company will usually send a man to attend to this.

I haven't mentioned a single bulletin today. That will never do. In line with our talk on girls' clothes, I might suggest the one on "Fitting Dresses and Blouses;" or, if we're thinking of the cost of clothes, "Planning and Recording Family Expenditures." Both of these will be helpful to the girl who wants to dress economically.

Friday: "Betty Lou Plans a Sunday Dinner."

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